



# Veterans Support Centre Belconnen

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Patron: Air Vice Marshal Chris Deeble AO CSC



## ACT BUDGET SUBMISSION FINANCIAL YEAR 2018-19

### References:

- A. VV&VF Budget Submission 2 December 2011
- B. VV&VF Budget Submission 27 February 2013
- C. VV&VF Letter to Chief Minister November 2014
- D. VSC-B Budget Submission October 2015

### Purpose

Since 2012 the ACT Government has generously assisted the Vietnam Veterans and Veterans Federation (ACT Inc) (VV&VF), now trading as the Veterans Support Centre – Belconnen (VSC-B), to meet some administrative costs through grants provided by the Chief Minister’s Advisory Council (CMAC). In 2015 we were advised that this avenue of funding was no longer appropriate and that we should seek assistance through the budgetary process. We have now received funding in 2016 and 2017 through the ACT Office of Veterans and Seniors. This submission seeks to continue ACT Government funding to our organization for administrative costs including salaries of our permanent and part-time administrative managers and assistants.

### Background

The VSC-B is an Ex Service Organisation (ESO) dedicated to the welfare of service personnel and their families. Our members include veterans from all wars, conflicts, peacekeeping operations and periods of active service as well as serving and retired service persons and, recently, members of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Emergency Services (ES) who are suffering disabilities due to their service in regional conflicts and peacekeeping duties. Our current financial membership is about 600 with 85% being seniors over the age of 65 and the remainder younger veterans from contemporary conflicts or operations. We also provide support to serving members of the above organisations and their families, whether they are members or not, which means our contact with the Canberra to community numbers many thousands of people.

We started many years ago with our main role of assisting veterans with claims for compensation, pensions and widow’s pensions. These must be made under one or more of the following Acts: The Veterans Entitlement Act 1986 (VEA), the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA) (now DRCA) and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA). The forms, supporting medical evidence, questionnaires, evidence of eligibility and associated enquiries from Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) are very complicated and difficult for inexperienced people to deal with. Our Advocates attend numerous courses sponsored by DVA to ensure that they understand the ramifications of the claims process and stay up to date with changes to the legislation. All of this is done on a volunteer basis to support our clients.

Over the last few years an increasingly important role has been to provide welfare support to our clients and their families. To this end we provide community support services, a suicide prevention team, a hospital and hospice visiting group, some home visits and bereavement support. At our Page facility we have an administrative building providing an office staffed five days per week and offices/meeting rooms for advocates to meet our clients and assist them. The facility also provides a drop-in centre for clients, wood work and metal workshops (Men’s Sheds), a guitar and singing group, a walking group and we hold weekly BBQs to enable members to gather in a social setting. We conduct about four bus trips per year to local places of interest. We also publish a quarterly newsletter, maintain a website at [www.vvfact.org.au](http://www.vvfact.org.au) and we are on

Facebook at Veterans Support Centre Belconnen. All of these activities help to minimize the effects of social isolation and ensure regular communication with our members.

These activities support our members and clients and significantly reduce the medical, mental health and community facilities which have to be provided by the ACT Government for our members and clients.

### **Support to Other Organisations**

We do not concentrate exclusively on former military people. We sponsored our Ladies Auxiliary while they developed, trialled and presented a carer's course. Carers are primarily the wives and partners of our members who often develop psychological or psychiatric disorders themselves through many years of living and caring for partners with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other mental health issues. The carer's course provides guidance and techniques for coping with these issues.

The group "Picking Up the Peaces" was founded under our auspice and is still supported by us. They came into being some five or six years ago to support Australian Federal Police personnel suffering from PTSD after deployments overseas and now also support many Emergency Services including the ACT.

We also work closely with other Ex-service Organisations (ESOs) to provide support to the Defence community. We recently re-named the facility at Page to be the Veterans Support Centre – Belconnen which compliments the Veterans Support Centre – Woden which is sponsored by the Woden Valley RSL. These centres now provide support and, in some cases office space, to other ESOs including Belconnen RSL, Defence Force Welfare Association and Legacy.

### **Administrative Support**

#### *Volunteers*

Our centre is run by a volunteer committee supported by volunteer members to undertake the following tasks:

- 12 Advocates who undertake primary claims and applications related to existing DVA entitlements.
- 4 Advocates who take client's appeals to the Veterans review Board (VRB) and to the Administrative Appeals tribunal (AAT).
- 2 Suicide Prevention Officers who provide assistance during and after hours and have the experience and knowledge to provide 'first aid' counselling until appropriate treatment facilities can be made.
- 5 Welfare Officers who are accredited under a training programme provided by DVA.
- 10 Hospital Visitors who visit all veterans who request a visit through the Veterans Liaison Officer at each hospital.
- 15 Food van workers who man the caravan for fund raising at car shows and community events.
- 4 volunteer gardeners and workers who keep our grounds and the public areas outside our premises neat and tidy.
- 1 Music group co-ordinator.
- 1 Younger Veterans Morning Tea co-ordinator.
- 2 Weekly BBQ co-ordinators.

The volunteer effort described above represents over 25,000 person hours per year devoted to our members, serving personnel, their families and others in need, such as the AFP and ES, who are members of the Canberra community. In 2016 our advocates assisted 671 veterans with claims or appeals. The resulting medical support provided by DVA would have significantly reduced the medical and mental health demands on the ACT Budget. Our centre recorded over 6 000 visitors throughout the year providing a valuable resource for social interaction and support to our members and guests.

#### *Paid Staff*

In 2017 we have two full time and one part time staff members. Our full time staff are an Executive Support Manager who deals with welfare and community support matters, our Office Manager who manages the administration and the office (manned five days per week). The Office Manager is supported by a part-time administrative assistant. Ideally we would like to employ another administrative assistant to support our Office Manager in the down time. The paid staff directly support the operation of the Centre and enable the volunteers to provide the levels of support necessary for our Veterans

and Seniors in our community.

Salary costs for FY 2018/19 are estimated to be:

Executive Support Manager	\$ 59 400
Office Manager	\$ 59 300
Administrative Assistant (Part Time)	<u>\$ 32 850</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 151 550</b>

### **Funding**

As explained in References A-D recent funding for our administrative costs (mainly salaries) has been through a combination of Building Excellence for Support and Training (BEST) grants through DVA and grants from the ACT Government through CMAC and ACT Office of Veterans and Seniors. The BEST grant continues to fall far short of that required to maintain our operations at Page and we again ask the ACT Government for assistance through the budgetary process.

The other issue is the rise in the costs associated with running the centre. This ranges from wages to electricity, stationery, training and Information Technology expenses. Whilst most of our correspondence is now via electronic means some items related to claims need to be posted and recent postage increases have affected our costs severely.

### **Conclusion**

The VSC-Belconnen provides claims and welfare support to veterans, serving personnel, former military personnel and associated disciplines such as AFP and ES with disabilities or mental health issues and their families representing many thousands of ACT residents. Formerly we managed with funding under the BEST grant scheme from DVA, our own fundraising (including membership fees and donations) and, recently, with assistance from ACT Government grants. The support we provide to the Canberra community falls under a number of categories including:

- A senior citizens centre.
- A centre for disabled people.
- A centre for mental health support.
- A 'Drop In' Centre including Men's Sheds (woodwork and metal work).
- A support group for veterans, AFP and ES personnel suffering disabilities or social isolation.

We can continue to provide most of these services with the current level of funding provided by DVA, fundraising and assistance from the ACT Government. Any reduction in funding will mean reducing our administrative staff and transferring more work to volunteers. This will necessarily impact the service we can provide to our members and the Canberra community.

### **Request**

We request that the ACT Government assists the VSC-B by the allocation of \$150,000 in the 2018-19 Budget and the out years to cover some of the administrative costs in running the Veterans Support Centre – Belconnen.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Ian Thompson  
President  
Veterans Support Centre – Belconnen

24 October 2017

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